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# Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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## Humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons

### Working paper submitted by Algeria, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Egypt, Guyana, Indonesia, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Malaysia, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa and Thailand

1. The present working paper builds on a previous working paper on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons submitted to the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT/CONF.2015/WP.30). For the sake of brevity, not all elements of that paper are reproduced, although they remain relevant in their entirety. The present paper provides an update to the earlier document in the light of subsequent developments and reaffirms the significance of the issue in the framework of the review process.

2. Knowledge of the humanitarian consequences and associated risks of nuclear weapons has been available since 1945, if not before. The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons have been reflected in numerous United Nations resolutions, including the first resolution passed by the General Assembly in 1946. At the first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, held in 1978, it was stressed that "nuclear weapons pose the greatest danger to mankind and to the survival of civilization".

3. With respect to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the awareness of these consequences was indeed one of the key drivers for its negotiation, as evidenced in its first preambular paragraph: "Considering the devastation that would be visited upon all mankind by a nuclear war and the consequent need to make every effort to avert the danger of such a war and to take measures to safeguard the security of peoples".

4. It was the 2010 Review Conference, the latest to date to produce an outcome document, which focused specifically on this issue in its conclusions and recommendations for follow-on actions (2010 action plan) by expressing "its deep concern at the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons" and reaffirming "the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law". Moreover, the 2010 Review Conference resolved in action 1 of the 2010 action plan that "All

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States parties commit to pursue policies that are fully compatible with the Treaty and the objective of achieving a world without nuclear weapons".

5. The increased focus of the international community on the humanitarian consequences of and risks associated with nuclear weapons can be seen as an amplification of the deep concern expressed at the 2010 Review Conference and a valuable component of States parties' efforts to implement action 1 of the 2010 action plan.

6. Reflecting the centrality of the humanitarian imperative to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the overwhelming majority of States parties have supported and participated in activities that have heightened awareness about the fundamental importance of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons for the sake of all humanity.

7. The evidence presented at the three international conferences hosted by the Governments of Norway, Mexico and Austria in 2013 and 2014 demonstrated that the consequences for humanity of a nuclear weapon detonation, irrespective of its cause, would include death, destruction and displacement, as well as profound and long-term damage to human health, the environment, the climate and socioeconomic development. The evidence showed that the scope, scale and interrelationship of the humanitarian consequences caused by nuclear weapon detonations were catastrophic and more complex than commonly understood and could even threaten the survival of humankind. Moreover, new threats from cyber activity and terrorism relating to nuclear weapons came to the fore. An equally important result of the conferences was to show that the risk of nuclear war was much higher than was generally believed at that time.

8. As a result of the Vienna Conference, the Humanitarian Pledge, which was subsequently endorsed by 127 States, concluded that only the total elimination of nuclear weapons could reliably remove the risk of their use with its unacceptable humanitarian consequences, and called for the negotiation of an international instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, as a first essential step towards elimination.

9. Importantly, the broad humanitarian movement that manifested itself at the three conferences comprised not only a large number of States, but also international organizations with a humanitarian mission, such as the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross, as well as global civil society consolidated in the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. In recognition of its work to raise awareness about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, as well as to bring about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2017.

10. At the 2015 Review Conference, the results of the humanitarian discussions to date were summarized and presented in a joint statement on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, delivered on behalf of 159 countries by the then foreign minister of Austria, Sebastian Kurz.

11. On the basis of a recommendation from the report of the Open-ended Working Group taking forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations, established by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/33, inspired by the humanitarian discussions and consistent with the Humanitarian Pledge, the General Assembly, in its resolution 71/258, mandated that negotiations be held on a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination. The negotiations were successfully concluded with the adoption by 122 States of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons on 7 July 2017.

12. Awareness about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons will motivate the universalization and implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, now embedded in the international nuclear disarmament and

non-proliferation regime, with the Non-Proliferation Treaty as its cornerstone. At the same time, the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons remain an important issue for discussion within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In the pursuit of the key objectives of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the full and effective implementation of the Treaty and the obligations and commitments on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation reached at the previous review conferences, the following recommendations regarding the subject matter of the present working paper are made to the 2020 Review Conference:

(a) To welcome that during the past two review cycles, findings and evidence on the humanitarian impact of nuclear weapons have been presented in fact-based discussions, including at international conferences;

(b) To recognize that the immediate, mid- and long-term consequences of nuclear weapon detonations, inter alia, on health, the environment, infrastructure, food security, climate, development, social cohesion and the global economy are significantly graver than previously understood, are interlinked, and would not be constrained by national borders but have regional or global effects, and may even threaten the survival of humanity;

(c) To be aware that the risk of a nuclear weapon explosion is significantly greater than previously assumed and is further increasing with proliferation, the lowering of the technical threshold for nuclear weapon capability and the danger of the access to nuclear weapons and related material by terrorist groups;

(d) To express dismay at the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and to reaffirm the need for all States at all times to comply with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law;

(e) To recognize that new evidence that has emerged about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons lends further strength to the view that these weapons cannot be used in conformity with international law, in particular international humanitarian law;

(f) To emphasize that the consequences of nuclear weapon detonations and the risks associated with this weaponry concern the security of all humanity;

(g) To affirm that it is in the interest of the very survival of humanity that nuclear weapons are never used again, under any circumstances;

(h) To be cognizant of the fact that the risk of nuclear weapons' use can be avoided only through the total elimination of nuclear weapons and maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons, which is an objective of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the latter being an effective legal measure under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons;

(i) To recognize that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons acknowledge the deep concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons and that awareness of these consequences must underpin all approaches and efforts towards nuclear disarmament;

(j) To emphasize that the scope of consequences of a nuclear weapon detonation and risks associated raise profound moral and ethical questions;

(k) To commit to further enhancing awareness of the humanitarian impact of and risks associated with nuclear weapons with a view to increasing the urgency with which a world without nuclear weapons is pursued and achieved;

(l) To call on the nuclear-weapon States, pending the total elimination of their nuclear weapon arsenals, to take concrete interim measures with urgency to reduce the risk of nuclear weapon detonations and to increase their transparency and accountability in this regard;

(m) To stress that in the light of the growing understanding of the risk posed by nuclear weapons and their devastating humanitarian consequences, there is an urgent need for the full implementation of existing obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty and its previous review conferences to identify and pursue effective measures for the achievement of a world without nuclear weapons, and to call on all States parties to spare no efforts in this regard.



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